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Plume On The Ceiling Henri Michaux

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Henri Michaux

PLUME ON THE CEILING

In a silly moment of distraction, Plume started walking on the ceiling rather than on the ground.

Alas, when he noticed what he was doing, it was too late.

Paralyzed by the blood that had quickly congealed in his head, solid as steel in a hammer, he didn't know what was what. He was lost. Horrified, he considered the far-off floor, the couch that had once been so accommodating.

The entire room seemed an astonishing abyss.

How gladly he'd have been put into a vat full of water, into a wolf trap or coffin or geyser, rather than here, alone, on the absurdly deserted ceiling, from which any descent would be death.

Misery upon misery! Meanwhile, everyone else in the entire world—none of them, surely, any better than he—was tranquilly treading the earth.

If only he could actually *enter* the ceiling, and then, however quickly, put an end to his sad existence. . . . But ceilings are hard, impenetrable; they can only send you back, so to say.

There is no choice when it comes to unhappiness; you simply take what you get. Moron of the ceiling, he desperately held out until a delegation from the Bren Club, dispatched as a search party, found him there, feebly lifting his head.

By way of a stepladder, they got him down, never a word.

The members were all pretty upset. They made excuses for Plume. They wildly accused some absent organizer. They flattered him for his valor: so many others, after all, would have thrown themselves into the void, breaking arm and leg. They further noted that the ceilings in this part of the world were high, most of them dating back to the time of the Spanish Conquest.

Plume did not respond, but simply brushed off his sleeves in embarrassment.

Translated from the French
by **Sydney Lea**